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NBC ``MEET THE PRESS``
WITH HOST, TIM RUSSERT
JOINED BY, TOM BROKAW

INTERVIEW WITH:
PRESIDENT BILL CLINTON

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 7, 1993

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``NBC'S MEET THE PRESS.``

ANNOUNCER: From Washington, this is a special edition of
``Meet the Press`` -- the 46th anniversary of the
longest-running television program in the world.

And now, from the Oval Office, the president of the United
States, William Jefferson Clinton.

TIM RUSSERT: Welcome again to ``Meet the Press.`` Today a
special edition, live from the White House. I'm with my
colleague Tom Brokaw.

Mr. President, this is our 46th birthday. You're 47. You
strike me as the kind of guy who maybe watched the first program
from your cradle.

PRESIDENT CLINTON: (Laughs.) I wish I could. I didn't
have a television then. I was 1 when you started, but I was 9, I
think, when we got our first television in 1956, so I couldn't
start, but I did watch it often after that.

MR. RUSSERT: Well, it's great to have you here. Let's
start -- a lot to talk about today. Let's start with NAFTA, the
North American Free Trade Agreement. Your closest supporters say
that if the vote were held today, you're still 30 votes short.
True?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: I don't think we're quite that short,
but we're 30 votes short of having explicit, express
commitments.

MR. RUSSERT: What --

PRESIDENT CLINTON: I think we'll, however.

MR. RUSSERT: What role has Ross Perot played in this

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debate?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: I think he's kept things stirred up. That's what he likes to do. And -- but I think frankly the vociferous, organized opposition of most of the unions telling these members in private they'll never give them any money again, they'll get them

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opponents in the primary, you know, the real rough-shod, muscle-bound tactics, plus the fact that a lot of the business supporters of NAFTA have not gotten their employees and rank-and-file people to call and say they're for it. On any issue like this, the intensity is always with people who are against it. Those things are difficult.

But, again, I will say I have been quite heartened by the responses of the last 10 days. More and more of these members of Congress are men and women who want to do right by their country, don't want to hurt the United States, and understand that NAFTA means more jobs, not just in Mexico, but throughout Latin America -- a huge trading block of people helping to take us to the 21st century.

MR. RUSSERT: Bob Dole mentioned last night that you were elevating Ross Perot. Are you concerned that you're going to re-create a monster?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Well, Ross Perot's got enough money to elevate himself. He can buy his way on national television and buy his own exposure and have very little accountability, except when he makes the mistake of coming on this program with you.

MR. RUSSERT: Without his charts.

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Yeah. (Laughter) The same mistake I made today. (Laughter) I think the vice president will do well. Ross Perot is a master of the one-liner and the emotional retort, but I believe that the vice president has an unusual command of the facts and a real commitment, a profound commitment to this issue, and the American people who watch Larry King will see that it's no accident that all the presidents -- living presidents and all the living Nobel-prize-winning economists and 41 of the 50 governors are for this. It's good for the American economy.

MR. RUSSERT: Are you trying to demonstrate to the undecided Democratic congressman, "Listen, this is a choice between Clinton/Gore and Perot"?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: No, absolutely not. He is a visible spokesperson for this. As I said to you, at least for the

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undecided Democrats, our big problem is the raw muscle, the sort of naked pressure that the labor forces have put on --

MR. RUSSERT: Are you afraid that Democratic congressmen are in the pocket of labor?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: No, I didn't say that, but I said that a lot of them are saying, 'Well, I'm not hearing from these businesspeople who are for it. Their employees are not telling me they're for it, and I'm hearing from all these people either pleading with me based on friendship or threatening me based on money and work in the campaign, and I don't hear it.'

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So I think what we want to do and what the vice president's trying to do here -- and this was his idea -- is to let the American people listen. Yes, Ross Perot is against it. Yes, a number of other people, Pat Buchanan and others, are against it. But if all the presidents are for it, all the secretaries of State, all the Nobel-prize-winning economists, who never agreed on anything else in their lives, probably, and virtually all the governors are for it, it must be good for the American economy.

MR. RUSSERT: We have, in fact, lost jobs to Mexico, and their concern is we'll lose more and it also would depress wages. There's a clause in the treaty which, with six months' notice, any side can void it. Would you say to the American people that if the treaty passes, you'll monitor it and if, say, in two years you are convinced there is a sucking of jobs and a depression of wages, you would move to abrogate the treaty?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: If I thought the treaty were bad for the American economy, of course I would do that.

But let me tell you there's another provision of the treaty that we negotiated that I also want to emphasize, because it goes more to the heart of what many Americans are worried about. It deals with the so-called surge problem. That's a term of art which in common language means, but what if this is a good deal for America and a good deal for Mexico, but some part of our economy -- or theirs, to be fair -- has an overwhelmingly negative impact, it's something that nobody ever dreamed would happen. There's also a provision that allows us to slow the agreement down as it applies to that. So there's no question that we have the protections we need. We can get out in six months if it's bad for us and we can stop anything horrible and unforeseen.

This treaty is going to make the problems with Mexico over the last 15 years better. It will raise the environmental investments in Mexico. It will reduce the trade barriers to our

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selling products in Mexico. It means more sales and more jobs.

It also -- keep in mind, Mexico is just five percent of the American economy. It will improve our relationships with our biggest neighbor and thereby help us to take this kind of deal to the rest of Latin America so that we can establish a 700 million person trading block. That's real jobs for America.

MR. RUSSERT: The day after the vote November 17, the next day on the 18th, you leave for Seattle to meet with 14 other nations -- China, Japan. If you go there having lost NAFTA, what does it do to your standing?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Well, I'd say I'd sure rather not do it.

Well, let me give you the flip side. If I go there and NAFTA passes in the House, it will be a clear statement to Asia number one that the United States is not withdrawing from the world. We are

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determined to be the world's leading economic power by competing and winning, not from running away.

Number two, I'll be able to say what I have been saying to the Asians: Asia's important to us, but we want free trade. We want access to your markets. They will see us developing the NAFTA market, which is not just Mexico, it's Latin America, Canada, the whole nine yards, and that will be enormous pressure on them to conclude these world trade agreements, these GATT talks, by the end of the year. It will also help us with Europe to do that.

So I can't tell you how important I think it will be. If we go out there without this agreement, they may say, 'Well, President Clinton wants to have an open door to Asia, but is he really going to be a tough competitor. They ran away from Latin America, their best friends and best consumers, and can he deliver? Will the Congress run away from it even if he tries to expand trade?'

My ability to get done what is plainly in the economic interests of this country will be weakened. Now, that's very important, because almost all these people who are for -- against NAFTA, against NAFTA, are still for the GATT talks, for the big treaty on world trade. They all know it will create hundreds of thousands of manufacturing jobs for America. They should consider how much harder it's going to be to get GATT if the House votes NAFTA down and how much easier it will be to get GATT if the House adopts NAFTA.

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MR. RUSSERT: Tom.

MR. BROKAW: Mr. President, let's talk about health care. There's been a lot of confusion about the numbers coming out of the White House. Mrs. Clinton went to the Hill and said that if the Clinton plan passes, costs will go up for about 35 to 37 percent of those now covered. Then Donna Shalala, secretary of health and human services, said 40 percent. Last week, Leon Panetta said 30 percent. Even your strongest advocates, like Jay Rockefeller, were holding their heads, in effect, in anguish. Another Democrat said, 'We've got to prove that Democrats can count.' Hasn't your credibility been hurt on whole cost issue?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Maybe, but what I would like to emphasize is we're the only people who have a plan. It's very easy for everybody else to sit up in the peanut gallery. This is a very complex thing. Keep in mind, you're talking about small amounts of money -- is this person going to pay \$6 more a month or \$60 less a month? -- trying to calculate how it would go if this plan would be passed just as it is.

Now let me say what was wrong with the early figures where they said 40 percent of the people with insurance would pay more. Here's what was wrong with them, why they were too high. The people who have insurance today, we now think that 70 percent will pay the same or less for the same or better benefits. Why did they say 60 before? Because they neglected to calculate this: A lot of people who have

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insurance don't really have it. That is, they have \$5,000 deductibles. So they're paying every year, they just may not be paying in their insurance premium.

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So they went back and calculated based on what we now know about how much out-of-pocket people pay -- you have \$2,500, \$3,000, \$5,000 deductible. That is something they neglected to think about. So now, who will pay more under this who has insurance already? People who have essentially catastrophic policies, who have very limited benefits and young single workers will pay more because if they pay more, it will enable us to have what's called community ratings, so that if a working family, middle-aged working family with a sick child can still get insurance at an affordable cost, and all the young workers who don't have insurance will be brought into the insurance system, and even they will get something for it. That is, what they get for it is knowing their insurance can never be taken away. There'd be a floor.

Finally, let me say this. If you look at the experience of the last 12 years, when insurance, when health costs really started to take off, and then you think about what it will be like five years from now, a hundred percent of the American people will pay more five years from now than the rate of inflation if we don't do something.

In other words, at least what we're trying to do, we'll lower the rate of increase for all the American people, so within five years, everybody'll be better off, I believe.

MR. BROKAW: Mr. President, no one disagrees with the idea that you have engaged the country in a debate about health care, which is long overdue, but the fact is that you want to add 37 million people to the insurance pool. There are new technologies coming on board all the time that cost a lot more money. You're willing to pick up the early retirement benefits for corporations. You've added mental health and free prescriptions. It seems to a lot of folks that you ought to be going slower and that you ought to accept kind of phased-in universal health care coverage in five years. Would that be --

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Yeah, but the problem is --

MR. BROKAW: -- would that be acceptable to you?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: The problem is -- we are phasing it in over three years --

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MR. BROKAW: Well, would that be --

PRESIDENT CLINTON: -- through all of '90 -- we're getting -- we're anticipating passage of this program in '94, and then letting people have '95, '96, and '97.
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But let me emphasize, Tom, the people who make that argument assume something that we assume all the time in America, that we just can't do things that other people can do. We tolerate conditions in America that are intolerable in other countries.

Now, the condition we tolerate by not having everybody insured is higher health care costs. That is, you've got folks in medicine in your family. You know this -- not insuring everybody raises health care costs because all those people without insurance if they need health care will get it. They'll get it when it's too late, too expensive, and someone else will pay for it, and that rifles the cost. So by accelerating the moment of universal coverage you not only do the morally right thing by finally letting Americans join the ranks of all these other advanced countries and giving everybody health security, you immediately begin to lower the rate at which costs increase.

So you can argue about all these other things, but it seems to me delaying the time of universal coverage will aggravate the price spiral, not make it better. We assume that universal coverage will cost more when every other country that has universal coverage is paying much less than we are and having less inflation.

MR. BROKAW: Would you sign a living will publicly? About one-third of our health care costs in America go to the last year of life. Mrs. Clinton has talked about you doing that. Are you prepared to do that?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Well, I certainly would sign one. I don't know if I would do it in public, but I'd be glad to tell you what's in it. I don't know. There's something so -- I don't know. I've never thought about a public demonstration of a private act like that, but we've given a lot of thought to it because of the experience I had with my stepfather when he died, when Hillary's dad died earlier this year. We know that -- I think families should think about living wills and should have them. It's not something the government should impose on them. But we do have a lot of extra costs that most people believe are unnecessary in this system, and that's one way to weed some of them out.

MR. BROKAW: And ultimately are we going to have to come to

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health rationing in America, especially those heroic procedures that are long on odds and very expensive -- take that money and spend it on prenatal care and other procedures that might extend life at the beginning, not at the end?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Well, let me say before we make that decision, we should acknowledge two things: One is we're rationing health care right now. There's a huge rationing going on and out. It's just a roll of the dice whether you have it or not and what you get.

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What we do know is that if our plan passes and we put more emphasis on primary and preventive health care and primary physicians getting out there and taking care of people and stopping bad things from happening, we'll have less need for those extreme procedures.

I do not believe we want America to pull back from the technological advances that we all treasure. I do not believe we want to tell people they can't have procedures that have a realistic chance of saving their lives and returning them to normal, so I suspect we'll always be willing to pay a little more than any other country in the world to do that, but if we do more with the primary side, we'll be better off.

MR. RUSSERT: Mr. President, you're still confident we'll get a health care bill by next year?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Oh, I think we will. Absolutely.

MR. RUSSERT: We have to take a break. We'll be back with more from President Bill Clinton in the Oval Office. We'll talk a little bit about foreign policy.

(Announcements.)

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x x x (Announcements.)

MR. RUSSERT: We're back, live from the Oval Office.

Mr. President, a lot of growing concern about North Korea, a country that we fought some 40 years ago. Will you allow North Korea to build the nuclear bomb?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: North Korea cannot be allowed to develop a nuclear bomb. We have to be very firm about it. This is a difficult moment in our relationship with them and I think a difficult moment for them. They're one of the most -- perhaps the most isolated country in the world, with enormous economic problems, trying to decide what direction to take now, sometimes seeming to reach out to South Korea, sometimes seeming to draw back.

I spend a lot of time on this issue. It's a very, very major issue. We have got to stop the proliferation of nuclear weapons, and particularly North Korea needs to stay in the control regime. They don't need to withdraw.

Now, there is a lot of disagreement about what we should do now. I just want to assure you and the American people that we are doing everything we possibly can to make the best decisions, to be firm in this. We are consulting with our allies in South Korea and Japan. They are most immediately affected by what we do and how we do it. And we have worked with the Chinese, who, despite our other differences, have helped us to try to work through this.

MR. RUSSERT: Would one of the options be a preemptive strike the way the Israelis took out the Iraqi nuclear reactor?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: I don't think I should discuss any specific options today.

All I can tell you is that I tried to issue the sternest, clearest possible statement about this when I was in Korea. Nothing has changed since then. I think you asked me a question about it at one time also, Tom. This is a very grave issue for the United States.

MR. RUSSERT: There are 800,000 North Korean troops amassed on the South Korean border. If the North Koreans invaded South

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Korea, would that in effect be an attack on the United States?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Absolutely. We have our soldiers there. They know that. We still have people stationed near the Bridge of No

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Return. I was up there on the bridge, I was in those bunkers with our young Americans. They know that any attack on South Korea is an attack on the United States.

MR. RUSSERT: Tom?

MR. BROKAW: President Yeltsin of Russia has said over the weekend that he wants to now delay the presidential election until 1996. That is the full term for him, but he had said publicly that he would do it in the spring of next year. You had endorsed that. Now for him to pull back from that public commitment to elections next spring, is that a mistake on his part?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Well, let's -- let me first say reading -- and all the -- I have not spoken with him directly because I didn't -- late yesterday evening, I was made aware of his comments. So I'm not sure exactly what he said and exactly what he meant. The -- his comments are subject to more than one interpretation. I do think the following things. I think he had always assumed he would run for reelection, and his comments seemed to indicate that he may not want to do that and he may want to simply finish his term.

As long as he is promoting democracy, as long as he's promoting human rights, as long as he's promoting reform, I think the United States should support him. He has been brave and consistent.

I think on this issue we'll have to see how it plays out. I'm sure after the elections of the parliament in December, they will have something to say about it. One of the things that Boris Yeltsin has really understood is that it's not good if he's the only source of legitimate democratic power in Russia -- and he is now. He's been elected twice by the Russian people in the last couple of years. After December, we'll have another major player, sort of like the president and the Congress here. And as we know, they'll be urce of legitimate democratic power and we'll see how it works out.

MR. BROKAW: Let me ask you about China. You said during the course of the campaign that President Bush coddles China despite a continuing crackdown on democratic reformers, the brutal subjugation of Tibet, the irresponsible exportation of military and nuclear technology. Your administration now is

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demonstrably warming up toward China. Have conditions changed there?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Well, first of all, let's talk about what we've done. The Chinese have complained because they think we've been so much firmer and colder. We imposed sanctions because of weapons technology transfers that the Chinese engaged in that we opposed. So we have taken steps there that were not taken previously.

But we also have had a consistent economic relationship with them. The United States this year will purchase 38 percent of China's exports, a little known fact. The American people -- not the American

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business community that wants to invest there, the American people have been very good to the Chinese people in supporting their economic advances. We believe their movement toward market reform and decentralization will promote more democracy in China and better policies.

I want to engage President Jiang on that, and I think we can do so. But we also have to be very firm on these issues of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and human rights. But I think we have to pursue both courses at once. I don't think you can isolate a country as big as China, as important to the world's future as China, but neither can you simply turn away from things that you cannot abide. And that's what we've tried to do. We've tried to strike the right balance and I think we have.

MR. BROKAW: Even some of your partisans on Capitol Hill believe that you've not shown a strong enough hand on foreign policy. After your experience in Somalia, will you be as eager to get involved with the United States in operations of that kind in the future?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: I think what we have to do is to recognize that the United Nations peacekeeping function is still very important and sometimes works very, very well. What they've done in Cambodia, with our financial support, but with no Americans there, is truly remarkable. Will it transform Cambodia? Who knows? Maybe it will all go back to the way it was, but at least the United Nations has given Cambodia a chance.

That is what we're doing for Somalia. Will they be able to overcome their historic, deeply embedded clan warfare? I'm not sure. But at least we're giving them a chance.

What's wrong with the United Nations' peacekeeping

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operations is that it's too much of an ad hoc thing. Some work, some don't and a lot of the command and control operations, a lot of the training details, a lot of the simple organizational things that are important have not been worked through. So the United States favors a substantial restructuring and upgrading of the peacekeeping operations in ways that would permit us to participate in the future with a much higher level of confidence.

MR. RUSSERT: Let's turn to Somalia, Mr. President. The reports yesterday that the United States troops will take again once -- a very visible role. What does that mean?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Well, when I announced that we would pursue the political objective a few weeks ago, I also said we would stay there and complete our mission. Our mission there is to deliver the humanitarian supplies and to keep the lines of communications open. We stood down from patrolling the roads when the voluntary cease-fire was announced in Somalia to try to let things calm down and to try to get the political process going.

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Now that there is a political process, as always is the case, there's also a lot of maneuvering in a quasi-military sort of way. We cannot allow that to undermine the humanitarian mission. And our people cannot be expected, our young soldiers there cannot be expected to just sort of hunker down and stay behind walls. That almost puts them at greater risk. So we have to go out now and make sure that the ordinary conditions of the U.N. peacekeeping mission are continued even in Mogadishu, and that's what we're doing.

MR. RUSSERT: The secretary-general of the U.N., Boutros Boutros-Ghali, said that unless you disarm the warlords and the clans and put together and fashion a political settlement before you leave, the mission will have been a failure.

PRESIDENT CLINTON: I disagree with that. First of all, that's the argument he made to the Bush administration. I mean, President Bush's administration simply refused to get involved in disarmament. Arguably, it would have been easier then at the moment when we came in, when everybody was starving and we were at our moment of maximum popularity and leverage, but I'm not sure that decision is wrong. In the end, the international community will have to broker political resolutions within countries. But our ability to stop people within national boundaries from killing each other is somewhat limited and will be for the foreseeable future.

I mean, they have -- they are going to have to make up

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their mind. I think the better course is to get these African nations, to get Ethiopia, to get Eritrea, to get their neighbors involved in trying to work out a political solution. Those people now remember what it was like before we came there. We're going to do everything we can in the next several months to get this political solution going. But for us to go in and disarm would run the risk of our becoming, in effect, combatants on one side or the other, particularly if some said, yes, we'll disarm, and others said no.

MR. RUSSERT: In retrospect, then, it was a mistake for you to send the Rangers to try to capture Mr. Aideed?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: No, that was a different issue. The mistake was -- and I want to clarify this because I am proud of what those Rangers did. The ones who gave their lives did not die in vain.

The ones who gave their lives and were wounded in the last instance did it because of the tradition of the Rangers of never leaving anybody behind, even someone who's been killed. And I feel terrible about what happened.

But what they were doing is trying to enforce the law. Their mission was to try to arrest people who were suspected of murdering the Pakistani U.N. soldiers. The mistake was not that they were trying to do that, the mistake was that we were out doing that and while we were doing that, the political dialogue shut down so that the people that were associated with Aideed thought we the U.N., not we the U.S., but we the U.N. were trying to cut them out of Somalia's future.

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And what we have tried to do is to lower our profile on the military police side so that the political dialogue can start again. Now that that's going on, we're going to do the U.N. mandate.

MR. RUSSERT: And all troops will be out by March 31st?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Yes.

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MR. RUSSERT: Quickly on Haiti --

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Go back to my statement -- they'll be out by March 31st except for a couple of hundred support personnel who may be there to do just logistical things --

MR. RUSSERT: Which is what you said before.

PRESIDENT CLINTON: That's right.

MR. RUSSERT: Haiti -- the military leaders have refused to meet. Your policy, United States policy is to reinstate Mr. Aristide. Is it now time to broaden the embargo from just fuel and -- to everything?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: We have to strengthen the embargo. There are two options. We can in effect have a total embargo and try to shut the country down. That will be more painful in the near term to the average Haitians who are already suffering.

We can also try to do something that will target those people that are causing this problem, which is to get all the other nations of the world to side with us in freezing the assets of the wealthy Haitians who are plundering that country, keeping democracy from taking root, and supporting the police chief and the military.

I would prefer to do that, but I'm not going to rule out the other things, and we're following this on a daily basis, spending a lot of time with it.

MR. RUSSERT: So we could have a complete embargo on all goods?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: That is an option, but I also hope that the other wealthy nations of the world that have assets deposited from these Haitian interests who are keeping democracy from returning will join us in freezing those assets. That would really help. That would do more in less time to change the political climate than anything.

MR. RUSSERT: President Bush invaded Panama to remove Noriega. Would you consider invading Haiti to reinstate

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Aristide?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: I don't want to rule anything in or out. Let me just say that there's a difference here, though. He went to Panama not only to remove Noriega for the Panamanians, but because Noriega himself was wanted for violating American law as a drug runner.

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Prime Minister Malval and President Aristide have both not called for us to do that. In fact, one of the problems we had with the Governors Island agreement is that neither they nor the other side wanted the United States or the U.N. there in a police function. That is, those folks we were trying to land the other day were supposed to train the army to be the army corps of engineers to rebuild the country. Neither side has wanted that. And they had these bad memories of invasion.

Last time the Americans went there, in 1915, we stayed nearly 20 years. So they have not asked for that. But I don't think we should rule anything in or out.

MR. RUSSERT: Your stated policy of the United States is to reinstate Mr. Aristide. The CIA has gone around this town saying that Aristide is mentally unstable. Can you as commander-in-chief tolerate that insubordination by the CIA?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Well, I think you have to ask yourself whether it's insubordination or not. And let me tell you what I mean by that. The CIA is duty-bound to tell the Congress what it knows. That's the law, just like the joint chiefs of staff are duty-bound to go when asked, express their personal opinion if they have an opinion different from the president, even though they work for me.

In secret hearings, the CIA told the -- told the Senate what they had told me before, which is there is -- that they thought they had some evidence which questioned Mr. Aristide's ability to be president of Haiti. All I can tell you is -- and I'm glad in a way that it came out since it had been whispered around, that based on my personal experience, the vice president's repeated contacts with him, the willingness of Aristide to work with our people -- he has done everything he said he would do, and more importantly, he agreed to put in Mr. Malval, who was a respected businessman, to give some balance.

Aristide may not be like you and me. He's had a very different life. But two-thirds of the Haitians voted for him, and he has shown a willingness to reach out and broaden his base. So I just disagree with -- and I also disagree that the old CIA reports are conclusive in their evidence. But they had a

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legal responsibility to tell the Senate.

If I had put the thumb on them, you'd be asking me why are you gagging the CIA from giving American intelligence to the Senate Intelligence Committee --

MR. RUSSERT: I might ask you that --

PRESIDENT CLINTON: You would.

MR. RUSSERT: Finally, in this round, a lot of calls, or suggestions that Secretary of Defense Aspin, Secretary of State Christopher resign. Are they secure in their positions?
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PRESIDENT CLINTON: I don't think that the president should even discuss that sort of thing, those personnel things.

Let me say this. I think they deserve credit for doing well on many big things. This administration has secured the interest of America in dealing with Russia, in dealing with the Middle East, in raising economic issues to a new high, in conducting a thorough security bottoms-up review of the Pentagon and our military operations and in many other areas.

We found three problems that we inherited here when we got in that are very difficult problems, in Bosnia, Somalia and Haiti. And every day you can pick up the newspaper and see opinions on both sides about what we should do, or a myriad of sides. We're doing the best we can on those.

And we're going to do it, and we're going to do it with the team we've got as long as we're all working together. I think that they have worked very hard, and I think that some of the attacks on them have been quite unfair.

MR. RUSSERT: Mr. President, we have to take a break. We'll be back with more from the Oval Office and talk about crime and kids in America.

(Announcements.)

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MR. RUSSERT: We're back on ``Meet the Press.'' I'm with my colleague Tom Brokaw talking to the president of the United States in the Oval Office.

Mr. President, in recent months on ``Meet the Press,'' we've talked to Senator Pat Moynihan, Washington Post columnist William Raspberry, the Reverend Jesse Jackson about the problem of kids and crime. And they are in agreement that the break-up of the traditional family as we know it -- two out of every three black kids born this year will be born out of wedlock, two out of five white children born out of wedlock. Is the break-up of the traditional family unit a national crisis?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Absolutely. It is absolutely a crisis and --

MR. RUSSERT: And what can we -- what can you do about it as president?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Well, I think that as president I have to do two things. One is to speak about it and to focus the attention of the nation on it. I went to the University of North Carolina recently and spoke to the 200th commencement -- anniversary there of the university, and gave a major speech trying to deal with the combined impact of the breakdown of the family and the rise in violence and the rise in drugs and the lack of economic opportunity and how it's all --

MR. RUSSERT: There's a correlation --

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Absolutely --

MR. RUSSERT: -- between crime and drugs and the breakdown of the family.

PRESIDENT CLINTON: And to me -- let me back up and say I think America has two big challenges. One is to change in ways that will permit us to go into the 21st century winning as a country and as individuals. The second is to provide security in the face of all these changes so that people can have a coherent life, and that we can't do that with economic stagnation or with social disintegration and we're fighting with both.

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I mean, today in the Washington Post, there's a story of four people killed over the weekend, nine people wounded. A guy picks up a 1-year-old daughter -- maybe his daughter, a 1-year-old child, drives

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away, and people drive after him, shoot him in the head and the bullet goes through the girl's body and blows her shoe off, you know.

Three or four days ago, an 11-year-old girl planning her own funeral. I mean, these things are terrible. And what I think -- let me just say, I called the attorney general last night. We talked for 30 minutes about this on the phone. We have got to use this administration to awaken in all Americans an understanding of this and to get everyone to ask what their personal responsibility is to try to help rebuild the family and the conditions of community. Then we have to follow policies which will do that.

MR. RUSSERT: Tom?

MR. BROKAW: Mr. President, do you think that there has been enough dialogue within the black community about this whole issue of families without fathers? Jesse Jackson recently has started a campaign on black-on-black violence, but there really -- among the activists in the black community, there hasn't been much public dialogue. Has that disappointed you?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Well, let me say this. I think there should be more. And I think that we should all be willing to face up to all the reasons why this has occurred. The famous African-American sociologist -- at least he's famous in our circles -- William Julius Wilson at the University of Chicago, wrote a little book a few years ago called, "The Truly Disadvantaged." It's only about 180 pages long. But it has -- it graphically shows you what has happened to black families in the inner cities and how the decline of the black family is associated not simply with the rise of welfare, but with the evaporation of jobs for black males in those areas.

So I think first that we ought to pass our crime bill here and put another 100,000 police on the street and do it right, and community policing. But we also have to get work back into the lives of people. You know, you can't have generation after generation not knowing work and expect there to be structure and order in peoples' lives. That's one of the things when Colin Powell retired as chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, you know, he talked about maybe he could be a role model for people outside the military who have none of the structure that's what makes the military go in this country.

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MR. BROKAW: So much of this is driven by drugs. Your administration has kind of taken drugs off the radar screen. Do you think you're going to have a take a harder line on drugs?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Well, first of all, I don't think that's a fair characterization. The administration has had to subject the drug budget to the same ruthless discipline that nearly every other budget has been subjected to so that while we have increased some drug funding, like in the block grant program, some of the rest of it has not been increased.

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What I have tried to do is to get people to see the drug problem first of all in terms of stopping the major sources and then here at home focusing on drug -- in terms of treatment and education and integrating it with out overall strategy on law enforcement and violence. I think this country needs a community strategy which deals with the crisis of drugs, violence, crime, the family and work. And we need to go not only nationally but at the grassroots level, and we need to understand that there's some basic things we have to do. If you want families to stay together, you've got to make it possible for people to be successful workers and successful parents.

If I can just briefly tell this one story. We -- a couple of Sundays ago, we had a family in here taking a tour, a man, a wife, three daughters, and one of these children was in a wheel chair. She was in this Make a Wish program, you know, a sick child wants to go see the president. I say hello, we have a picture. On the way out, the man says, "Mr. President, just in case you think that one person doesn't make a difference," he said, "You signed the Family Leave Bill, which gives me a right to spend time with my sick child and not lose my job. If you hadn't done that, if Congress hadn't passed it, I would have had to choose between spending this precious time with my daughter, who's probably not going to live, or keeping my job for my other two daughters and my wife. And I don't have to choose now. Don't ever think what you do doesn't make a difference."

A few days later, that little girl died. But that man knows that he was a good parent and a good worker. If you want -- that's just one example of the kind of things we have to do that have moral content even though they have may be public policies. But no matter what we do, there has to be reawakening of responsibility in every community.

That goes back to your other question. Should the black community be debating this? They should. Should the white community be debating it? We should.

MR. BROKAW: All of this, it seems to me, is fueling

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greater racial tensions, especially in the urban areas. Do you think that the racial tension and the racial climate in urban America now is better or worse than it was say 10 years ago?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: I think for middle class people, it's much better. I think the level of comfort among people of different races is much higher. I think the appreciation for diversity is greater. I think for people who are outside the economic mainstream it is much, much worse.

My God, we've got kids planning their funerals, 11-year-old kids. But the crying shame is that those people also want to be a part of mainstream America. I mean, look at these children. When they make these plans for their funerals, are they out there breaking the law?

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And one thing I'd like to say to the rest of America is, you read these horrible stories about how many people get killed on the weekends. Most of the people that live in all those neighborhoods never break the law, work for a living, for modest wages, pay their taxes, trying to do right by their kids. I mean, this country is falling apart because we have allowed that -- a whole group of us to drift away. It's not an underclass anymore, it's an outer class.

MR. RUSSERT: Mr. President, can we talk about this in direct terms without a cloud of political correctness hovering over the subject?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: I think we have to. I think we've got to get -- I think Jesse Jackson, frankly, has performed a good service by going out and starting this debate again when the American people are willing to listen.

We've got to be able to sit down and tell people what we think. There can -- I think that the American people are willing to put aside political correctness. But if we want to say tough things about the breakdown of the family and the responsibility of people who live in these communities, we also have to say tough things to the rest of America about how you can't just ignore these people until -- until you have to read about how they're having children having children and they're -- nobody's married and they're having babies and these kids are dying. You've got to have some structure in these communities and some opportunity. If you want to preach the American dream to them, there's got to be something there at the end of the road. So there's something for all of us to do here.

MR. RUSSERT: Mr. President, we have to take another break.

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We'll be back in just a moment to talk about Bill Clinton's first year in office.

(Announcements.)

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MR. RUSSERT: We're back with the president of the United States in the Oval Office.

Mr. President, your poll numbers are low, but the one that's most striking to me is that since you've been president, the number of people who think the country's on the wrong track has doubled. What happened?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Well, they may not know what's going on and I think we should all ask ourselves what responsibility that has. Let's look at the facts. Let's just look at the facts.

Since I became president, we have lowered the deficit, lowered interest rates, kept inflation down. This economy has produced more private sector jobs in the first nine months than in the previous four years. Jobs are up and investment is up. We have shown discipline and direction in the budget. It was a remarkable achievement.

Not only that, in that budget, we did something that has not been done for 20 years. We tried to reverse the inequality of incomes. We asked the wealthy to pay more and we gave over 15 million working families, comprising about 50 million Americans, a tax cut because they're working hard and still hovering around the poverty line. Most Americans don't know that.

MR. RUSSERT: So it's just a communications problem?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Well, no -- but let me finish.

MR. RUSSERT: Please.

PRESIDENT CLINTON: In that program -- one of the things I promised the American people to do to try to add more security to their lives was to open the doors of college education to everybody. We reformed the college loan program, we lowered the interest rates, we strung out the repayments. Most Americans don't know that.

We passed the family leave law, which I just spoke about. We have a major health care proposal on the table. We have opened any number of economic avenues of opportunity that everyone agrees with. We've got 37 billion more dollars in

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high-tech equipment up for exports and that'll create hundreds of thousands of jobs.

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So the economic record of this administration in only nine months is very good. The educational record of this administration is good. What we're doing on health care is unprecedented in our lifetime.

The foreign policy record on the issues that really affect our national security is good. There are the problems that nobody's figured out how to resolve. I concede that. I do not know what the answer to this is. But I know this: I believe that when historians look at this first year, they will be hard pressed to find many first years of presidencies that equal ours.

The Congressional Quarterly said the other day that only President Eisenhower had had a higher success rate in Congress than I have. If you go out and ask the average American, they think I hardly ever get anything passed.

Now -- now that may be --

MR. RUSSERT: But the voters --

PRESIDENT CLINTON: That's right. That may be my fault. It may be somebody else's fault. But the reality is, the economy's going in the right direction, we're -- I'm keeping the commitments of the campaign to empower people through education and through health care initiatives and through all these other things. Why don't they know that? I don't know. But I'm sure -- I gave a speech the other day to 250 people from my home town -- my home state that were up here, and I just went through these specific things and they said, 'There must have been a conspiracy to keep this a secret. We didn't know any of this.'

MR. RUSSERT: But in six states since you've been president, Senate seats in Texas and Georgia, governorships in Virginia, New Jersey, mayoralties in New York and Los Angeles, have all gone Republican. There must be some small message in there for you.

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Well, I think the message is people still want change. But, you know, you're from Buffalo. Don't you believe that all politics is local? I was a governor for 12 years and I can honestly say that of 150 governors I served with, I never heard one say, not one, that he or she won or lost an election because of a president.

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Now, what do these things say? They say people are still upset at crime, they're upset at the lack of jobs, they're upset when they're paying more taxes and think they're not getting something else for it. But we are addressing each of those things. Whether it's in the economic program, the health care program, the reinventing government program, expanding trade, we are addressing those things.

I think that what I have to do is to a better job of getting out there and getting the record there. But what happens here is every day's just a new battle. But I don't know anybody who's out there who

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believes that all these elections are any more than a referendum on what people want for their mayors and their governors.

MR. RUSSERT: Tom?

MR. BROKAW: Mr. President, Jimmy Carter used to complain that the White House press was here simply to play ``gotcha.'' Are you saying in effect --

PRESIDENT CLINTON: No --

MR. BROKAW: -- that the press coverage has failed you and failed the country?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: No -- well, I don't know about -- I think it may have failed the country some but not -- I don't take it personally. And I don't think it's a ``gotcha'' thing.

I think in a way it may be my fault. I keep -- I go from one thing to another. So we have one moment on national service, for example, the signature idea of my campaign, something we know the American people care about, and it happens, but it happens in the middle of all these other things, so nobody knows it happened. I think that's the big problem.

MR. BROKAW: Let me ask you about 1996. You had a meeting in the White House the other day with Colin Powell. He endorsed NAFTA. Do you think Colin Powell is a Democrat or a Republican? And do you think he'll run for office in '96?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Well, you have to ask him that. I don't think I should speak for him.

MR. BROKAW: But what's your instinct?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: I don't have an instinct. I think -- let me just say this. What I have determined to do is to get up every day and do what I think is right and try to move this

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country forward and keep the commitments I made to the American people and follow it through with real conviction and just let everything else happen.

I can't control a lot of events, but I do think it is astonishing to me -- and I take this on myself maybe more than you, but that -- to go back to Al Gore's line in the campaign, "What should be up is up; what should be down is down. We're moving in the right direction," and I have -- people should know that. And if they don't, then I have to examine why they don't. But perhaps you do, too.

MR. RUSSERT: Mr. President, we have to take a break. We'll be right back after this break.

(Announcements.)

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MR. RUSSERT: We're back with the president. Tom Brokaw, you have a question.

MR. BROKAW: Even in the Oval Office, you can hear the local protest outside about fire fighters or something in Washington, DC. You know that it is like living in a fish bowl here. Comedians have had a lot of fun with the fact that you run every day, but you don't seem to lose any weight. In fact, what can you tell us about your personal health? Have you lost weight?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Little bit --

MR. BROKAW: And have you changed your eating habits?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Well, yeah, quite a bit since I've been here. I have lost weight -- I gained a lot of weight in the campaign. I'm now almost back to where I was two years ago. I've lost weight and lost, I don't know, two or three inches off my waist. But I run six days a week. And I just try to -- like I say -- it's like everything else. I think you just have to get up -- sort of show up every day and try to make a little progress. I think that's what you do in life.

MR. RUSSERT: Mr. President, a friend of yours told me that you jokingly sometimes refer to life in the White House as the "crown jewel of the federal penitentiary system."

PRESIDENT CLINTON: That's right.

MR. RUSSERT: How confining has it been?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Well, it's pretty confining. And I

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always say I don't know whether it's the finest public housing in America or the crown jewel of the prison system. It's a very isolating life. And one of the things that frustrates me is that I get more easily out of touch and maybe even out of harmony with the American people. That's the question you asked me earlier.

I also know that every little word I say can be sort of twisted, you know. And again, I don't fault anybody, but I just have to be careful. I --

MR. RUSSERT: We have just a few seconds --

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Did you see what Gergen just did? He brought in this thing saying that the headline is now that Clinton accused labor of roughshod tactics and that's -- (laughter) -- I mean, those guys are my friends. I just don't agree with them on NAFTA. We're going to all work together --

MR. RUSSERT: We have just a few seconds --

PRESIDENT CLINTON: -- but I just, you know, that bothers me.

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MR. RUSSERT: Is there one thing that a year ago you were absolutely certain of that you're not quite sure about now?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Mm-hmm (affirmative response). I was absolutely certain a year ago that I could pursue this aggressive agenda of change and that every step along the way I'd be able to tell the American people what I was doing and convince them that we were going right. We're pursuing it, we're making in a way a little more progress than I thought we would, but there's a big gap between what we've done and what I've been able to tell the people about. I've got to do a better job.

MR. RUSSERT: Thank you for letting us join you in the Oval Office today.

I take it this is the room you'll invite the Buffalo Bills after they win the Super Bowl?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: That's right. The Buffalo Bills will be here if they win the Super Bowl this year.

MR. RUSSERT: Mr. President, thank you very much.

MR. BROKAW: You're going to be in office a long time if that's the case, Mr. President. (Laughter.)

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MR. RUSSERT: You're going to see this interview in its entirety tonight on CNBC at 8:00 p.m. Eastern time and highlights tomorrow on the ``Today'' program, and then ``Nightly News'' with my old buddy Tom Brokaw.

That's all for today. We'll be back next week. If it's Sunday, it's ``Meet the Press.''

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